



## Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

## IMMIGRANTS AND CRIME

---

BY HON. WILLIAM S. BENNET,  
Member of Congress for New York, and Member of the Immigration  
Commission.

---

My theme is Immigrants and Crime. In connection with crime there seems to be a tendency to restrict the term "immigrant" to the South European and Hebrew peoples. Statistics do not restrict the subject in that way, and people who sometimes carelessly read statistics without analyzing them, fly to the conclusion that the statistics relating to immigration and alien criminals relate entirely to the Italian, the Greek, the Syrian, the Slav and the Russian and Roumanian Jew. They do nothing of the sort. They allude to the foreign born, no matter how long he has been here, and if you will take the trouble the next time you look up the statistics of aliens in criminal institutions to analyze those statistics and find out how many years the bulk of them have been here, you will find that the great bulk of the aliens in our criminal institutions, the great bulk of the aliens in the institutions for the insane are of immigration which came here before the South European immigration started.

The Italian, and in the bulk, the Russian Hebrew and the Roumanian Hebrew immigration have arrived chiefly during the last twenty-seven years, and the aliens in our institutions are recruited from the class who have been in this country twenty, thirty or more years, although, of course, there is a regrettable number which go into our institutions in the first year.

We were lax in the early days in relation to immigration when there were nothing but sailing ships, and the rates of transportation were so high as to be almost prohibitive. Laxness then amounted to less than at present because expense barred the great mass of the immigrants, and it is to the few years since steam has made transportation easier and cheaper that we owe a great deal of our criminal and helpless alien population; although as far back as 1819 the Society for the Prevention of Destitution in New York City reported that the class of immigrants coming into the

country in those days was so low, so poverty stricken, and had such a tendency toward crime and illiteracy, that it was imposing a burden upon the community that certainly could not be borne. If I had not seen the date marked on the printed page, I might have thought that that particular report was made by a charitable society in 1908 in the same city. The problem is being stated, in the same words, with the lapse of nearly a hundred years. But what happened in the first few years of cheap steam navigation? This: there were no laws at all, except the inefficient, unenforced state laws. Any person that could get across the Atlantic Ocean and get his foot on American soil was safely here.

Our thrifty friends on the other side of the Atlantic took advantage of that, and thirty years ago societies were actually organized for the purpose of sending to this country criminals, paupers, old people, and the class that we call unfortunate women. They advertised in the newspapers for subscriptions. People left them legacies in their wills and they used that money to bring to this country the unfortunate from the lands across the sea, and they came into this country without let or hindrance.

That was all before the South European immigration had started, and from countries from which the very best of our immigrants, according to the universal acceptance, have come. It went so far that the British Government, about twenty-six or twenty-seven years ago, chartered a ship called the "Formosa" and sent it around Ireland, and from the workhouses in Ireland filled that ship and then started it straight for New York. There was instance after instance where the people from that ship were in the workhouse in New York City with British workhouse clothes still on them within twenty-four hours after the ship landed.

That is what we contended with in the past. There was no law against the pauper, the immoral person or the convict; just the wide-open door. We have had inspection of any sort only since 1892 or 1893, and only inspection that amounted to anywhere near the maximum since 1903—six years.

That there are alien criminals in this country it would be idle to deny. I will speak of the South European criminal, because with the criminal of other nationalities we have become acquainted. We have reached the point in connection with those people where we are willing to admit that a man born in Germany, or

England, or any of the Scandinavian countries, good or bad, is a separate individual. We refuse to admit that as yet in connection with the Russian Hebrew or the Roumanian Hebrew, the Greek or the Italian. We insist on treating them as a mass, and attributing the crimes of the individual to the people as a whole.

You can make all sorts of statistics about the Italian criminal based on what you put in or leave out in the matter of the major or the minor crime. A distinguished gentleman once drew up a table by which he proved that the Italians were at the head of the list in crime, and another equally distinguished and able gentleman analyzed the list and found that in making up the list all crimes resulting from intoxication, or the over-use of stimulants, had been left out. Of course, as the Italian is temperate, that treated him unfairly.

I have some statistics here about our own city and state. I presume that the proportion of foreign born in our state is something like twenty-six or twenty-eight per cent. of the whole. In the year 1907 there were 5513 convictions for felonies, that is, a major crime, in our state. Of those, 1757, or 31.87 per cent., were committed by the foreign born, only a per cent. or two above their proportion of the population. If, with the history of the centuries of our education and opportunities behind us, we have not gained something over the Italian, and particularly over the South Italian, then so far as our attempt to improve civilization is concerned, we have been a failure. If the percentage of crime amongst those of native-born parentage is as great as the percentage of crime amongst the foreign born, of what use to us have been our boasted and valued institutions?

My friends, talk about the Italian who comes here as the scum of Italy! I want emphatically to deny it. I am country-born myself, although to some extent city reared, and I never will accept or admit the doctrine that country people as a whole are inferior to city people. The Italian who comes here is the country man, the "contadino" from the hills.

Those who come from Naples and Palermo, and who did come from Messina are an extremely inconsiderable percentage. But if you get back in Sicily and Calabria,—and in New York if you mention Sicily and Calabria the people shudder and say, "those pest-holes; those breeders of vice and crime,"—they are mountain countries, particularly Calabria, where the people live a simple life in

villages. You cannot go into a village in any part of Calabria and stand on the street corner five minutes without having some one come to you who has a friend or relative in the United States, and you cannot stand there five minutes longer before some one comes along and talks English to you; some one who has been in this country.

They talk about the brigands of Sicily. There is just one left, and his name is "Maloney," but he does not spell it that way. Maloni—that is Maloney in Italian. Over in Calabria they have written a book on the last of the brigands, Musalino, and he is either dead or in jail. Brigandage in those countries was an economic fact. When wages were sixteen cents a day, and it was hard to get a job, a certain portion of the more daring and restless amongst the young men went into brigandage as an occupation. Now wages have risen to an average of forty cents, and work is fairly constant, and at certain portions of the year there is more of demand than there is of supply of labor, and, consequently, with a chance to earn their living honestly the youth of Italy are not going into brigandage.

The worst Italian comes from the cities. I have a little pamphlet here which I got to-day, "The Truth About the Black Hand," and most of it is true except where it says that there is no such thing as the Black Hand. There is a "Black Hand"; possibly not an organization like the "Molly Maguire," with a grip and a password, but an organization with a very thorough understanding. This says there is none. But ask the ordinary, well-to-do Italian about that, and see what he says. I found over in those little villages a condition which is new even to the Italian Government; men who had returned to the village of their youth because they had been threatened by the Black Hand in the United States.

There was an old baron in Galina, down in Calabria, who shook his finger at me across the room in a council chamber in the village and asked why we did not enforce the law in the United States so that decent, self-respecting Italians that came here could stay here, and I did not have any answer for him for the moment. A man of that class gets one letter from the Black Hand and pays no attention. He gets a second letter, sells what he has and goes down to the steamship office and buys a ticket. That shows whether he believes in the Black Hand or not.

The worst of this Italian criminal question as far as it exists, and of course it does exist, is that to so large an extent we could prevent the coming of the Italian criminal, and we may deport the Italian criminal that is here. If the Board of Aldermen in New York City would give Commissioner Bingham the secret service fund that he asks for, there are enough ex-Italian policemen in New York of the Carabonari, one of the best forces in the world, to cause a wholesale exodus of the Italian criminal, not only from New York, but from every city on the seaboard, within the next year.

Italy does not impose its criminals upon us. They enforce our law in their country as well as any foreign government will enforce the law of another country. The law is that no man who has been in jail in Italy can get a passport to come to this country, and that looks broad enough on its face, and with some exceptions no criminal does, but here is what they do. They get a passport to go to Canada from some prefects, not from others. They get a passport to go to Switzerland from any prefect. They go down to the sea-coast and ship as sailors at Palermo, and they used to go as far as Messina, in Sicily, and then the captain of the ship took them to the captain of the port and got them seamen's discharges. Then they went back to Palermo and shipped as seamen on a foreign ship and came to this country as members of the crew, and you will find instance after instance, on some of the foreign lines, where they absolutely shipped sailors, stewards, and so forth, putting them on the ship's articles only for the outward voyage. The United States Supreme Court has held that no matter what those men are, whether diseased, paupers, criminals or what, they do not come under the alien immigration law, and we cannot exclude them. The next time you look at the immigrants pouring out of the third class, and you shudder with horror because you assume that most of those men are embryo anarchists, and certainly criminals, do not shudder any more, because such of the criminals as come do not come that way. You are in a great deal more danger if you wander around in the part of the ship where the crew and stewards are than if you stick to the usually honest immigrant, who comes second or third class.

It would need but a slight agreement with the Italian Government to shut out from coming the majority of the Italian criminals. I said that no criminals come with passports except a few, and I want to indicate that class. Italy is not free from politics any more

than we are. They elect the city officials. The way a passport is gotten is for the man to go to the mayor of his commune and ask for a "nulla osta," which means there is nothing against him. If he has been in jail there is something against him; but I said to the mayor of a thriving city from which many come, "Suppose a man has been out of jail for two or three years, and he has a large family of influential friends, and he has behaved himself pretty well since he got out of jail, and they come to you and ask for a 'nulla osta' for this man, what would you do?" "Well," he said, "if the prefect of police has no objection, I don't object." After I had obtained that statement, the Italian official who had been going around with me saying how well the Italian government enforced the American law, said, "Of course we enforce the American law, but if you were a chief of police and there was a man who was making you a lot of trouble, and you had a chance to get him away and not come back, what would you do?" That is the way some get away.

Of course, the crime of the Italian is assault, murder, manslaughter—the crime of passion. The Italian tramp is almost a non-existent quantity. They all work, except these few from the big cities who live from the terror and oppression of their fellow-countrymen. There is no more vile or wicked criminal than the professional Italian criminal, and we should be thankful they are relatively so few in number.

The Greeks, so far as our investigation shows, are not criminals here. They get arrested for violation of city ordinances, they sell fruit without a license; in New York they run a pushcart when they have no right to. They do those things which a foreigner, ignorant of the customs and laws, quite frequently does in an alien country, but from the statistics the grave crimes with the Greeks are almost absolutely non-existent. They work. They get rich. They get rich more rapidly than any one else here except the Syrian, who in four or five years goes back to his own country comparatively a wealthy man. You ladies who the next summer will have come to your doors at the seashore or other places, the poor Syrian, selling you lace, perhaps ought to know, it ought to make some difference in the price you pay, that the Syrian goes back in four or five years with four, five, six, seven or eight thousand dollars in profits.

Those of you who are suffragists will perhaps be interested in

the knowledge that from Syria the woman sometimes comes first. It is the only country known from which the immigration comes that way. The women come first because they are better traders, better salesmen, and can get better access to the home than can the men, so the wife will come to this country and save up enough money to bring over her husband. Mrs. Bennet and I saw the unusual spectacle over in Syria of a woman starting to this country against the will of her husband. Her husband pursued her down to the train and attempted to take her from the train by force, but she was a woman, and she came.

The relation of the immigrant and the criminal may be summed up as follows: There is a great deal of exaggeration on both sides. Do not believe that the majority of immigrants coming here from the southern European countries are either criminals or have criminal instincts. It is not so. Think of them not as a mass, but with the knowledge that they are men and women, each with a separate individuality. On the other hand, do not believe that they are all angels by a good deal, because they are not. Centuries of oppression and centuries of want and poverty have not improved standards of living or character. They are better, perhaps, than we would be in their place, having undergone what they have undergone. On a general average, our American people are much better than they, as we ought to be with the opportunities that we have had.

Learn to treat the individual immigrant not as one of a nationality at all, bearing in mind always that we when we came were just as much of a problem to the people who were here as immigrants are to us, and not allow the crime of one Italian, in a moment of passion, to weigh for any more than the crime of an American, perhaps in a moment of deliberation.

Last night, in New York City, a discharged bartender walked out of a low-class saloon into the street and three men walked up to him. One of them had a revolver in his hand, which he placed right against the man's heart and shot him dead. The papers chronicled the fact, and they called it what it was—a murder. None of those men had South European names, and therefore there is no particular frenzy about it. It is a murder, a horrible, dastardly, brutal murder, and the police are trying their best to find the murderer. That is all right; but suppose the man had been an Italian, and the men who shot him down Italians; would the newspapers

have been as restrained in relation to it? Not at all. Some of our newspapers would have had headings, "The Beginning of Another Wave of Crime." It makes a difference who makes the killing, and yet in each instance it would be a man killed and a murderer who did it. Do not let us get wrought up about this either way. The percentage of crime is not particularly large, even in our state, where thirty-four per cent. of all the immigration is now stopping; not only thirty-four per cent., but most of the least wealthy, the weakest physically, are stopping right in New York, because they have not the money to go out to Nebraska, where in about two months they will be going out with lassoes to get innocent tourists to gather the crops in. They talk about immigration in the winter and abduct the tourist in the summer. It is not inconsistent; it is simply American.